



Al-Risala 1991

February

Wonder of Wonders

Looking at the human body from a purely physical point of view, one finds that it is made up of just water, carbon, oxygen and some other chemical elements. One can even work out, as scientist Robert Patison has done, the price of the material constituents of the human body. According to his calculations, their market value is about six and a half US dollars, – about one hundred Indian rupees.

Yet out of this one hundred rupees worth of matter, God has created a human being so wonderful that no price can be set upon him. Not even seventy billion rupees can buy the priceless masterpiece that God has fashioned in the shape of the human frame.

One can appreciate the pricelessness of the human body when some part of it is lost. If one loses a hand, for instance millions of dollars will not buy a new one like it. If one loses one's sight, all the wealth in the world will not win it back. If one's power of speech fails one, there will be no tongue in the shops of the world, which will put one's thoughts into words.

How wonderful that God should fashion something so wonderful out of things of no value. It is only He who can bring the dead to life; only He who has the power to convert insensate matter into conscious life, to make something out of nothing.

If a magician were to cast a spell on a stone, making it break into speech, everyone would be spellbound at his feat. The feat, which God has performed, is one of much greater complexity. He has made the inanimate matter that constitutes man's body into a moving, talking, thinking human being. Yet God's feat does not cause people to wonder. How blind are those who can see the skill of a conjurer's magical feats, but not the infinitely greater feats of God's creation! How ignorant are those who rush to become devoted disciples of anyone able to perform false tricks, without feeling any adoration for or attachment to the one who performs truly wondrous acts of creative genius. If only man were to truly discover God, he would become totally absorbed in the Lord's wondrous feats of creation. Everything in the world would appear to him as a remarkable sign of God's power and perfection. While dwelling in an earthly abode, he would see and feel nothing but the Lord on high.

5 February 1991

God the Greatest

The distinguished mathematician, Sir Michael Francis Atiyah, who visited Bombay recently, said that God was a mathematician. This idea is not new. About fifty years ago, sir James Jeans suggested that the universe was the handiwork of a mathematician. Centuries before him, Pythagoras said that all things were numbers. To Picasso, God was an artist. "God is really another artist," he said, "He invented the giraffe, the elephant and the cat." Einstein once said that the Lord is subtle and – though not malicious – is very clever.

A mathematician comes across such high mathematics as to make him aware of the triviality of his grasp on the subject. 'God is a great mathematician!' he exclaims. To an artist, the art displayed in the universe appears so sublime as to make his art seem worthless and he spontaneously cries out, "God is the greatest artist!" The wisdom prevailing in the universe is such as to astonish a genius; he in turn discovers that there is a genius far greater than him at work. The truth is that God is the greatest mathematician, the greatest artist and the greatest genius. One who fails to find the manifestations of God in the universe is blind, and one who does not believe in God after having seen Him is insensate. In fact, anyone who observes the universe is struck by the awesome feeling that there is a Being greater than himself at work in it.

God's might is indeed manifest in a thousand ways, but it is only those who open their minds and hearts to Him who can be truly aware of His blessings.

5 February 1991

Man will find himself standing on the verge of Hell

This was the first sermon the Prophet delivered on reaching Medina: "People, send forth for the future; you will surely reap the fruits of your actions."

Man's Craving for an Object of Worship

When Russian cosmonaut Andrei Nikolai returned to the earth after his space flight in 1962, he said at a press conference in Moscow on August 21, "when I landed on the earth, I felt like kissing the ground".

In all of the known universe, there is no place other than the earth where such enormous number of things have been gathered together to meet man's requirements. When the Russian cosmonaut went into space, he discovered that in its incredible vastness there was nothing for man but astonishment and confusion. There was nothing out there to provide either for his physical or his mental comfort. When, after this experience, he landed on earth, he realized the priceless value of his own planet, just as a man understands the value of water when he has been parched with thirst for a very long time. The earth with all its favourable circumstances appeared so dear to him that he felt like embracing it in order to express his feelings towards it.

This action is described in the *Shariah* as turning a thing into deity (*ilab*). Unable to see his Creator, man makes His creation his *Ilah*. A *momin* (true believer) is one who discovers reality by passing beyond appearances, having learned that all that is visible is God's bequest to mankind. For him, whatever is present on this earth has been created by the Supreme Being. He sees Creator in His Creation and makes him his all. All his best feelings are then offered to God.

When a man finds God his feelings towards his Creator are similar to those of the Russian cosmonaut on his return to earth, only they are on a far superior plane and of a much greater intensity. The *momin* is one who, on being touched by the sun's rays, sees in them the light of God. He should be able to find God in the very fragrance of the flower. He should see in the flowing waters of the rivers and streams the wonderful mercy of God. In the infinitude of space he should see the infiniteness of his Creator.

The difference between a *momin* and a *non-momin* is that the latter's vision stops short at the surface of creation, while a *momin's* vision passes straight through creation to its Creator. A *non-momin* becomes lost in the beauty of creation because he imagines that this beauty is inherent. But the *momin* sees in the beauty of creation the beauty of its Creator, and surrenders himself totally to God. The *non-momin* prostrates himself before mere things. The *momin* casts himself down before their Creator.

Today and Tomorrow

Greta Garbo (1905-1990), the American actress, was considered the most glamorous woman of the screen. At the highest point of her popularity, however, she retired from the film world in 1936 to live a life of total seclusion in a house in New York, until finally she breathed her last in the same life of seclusion.

Why did Greta Garbo live a life of seclusion for more than fifty years? This is an important question, which she herself never answered. This is what one commentator has written about this puzzling question.

Garbo took her moment, and when she realised that it was over, she retired into her private world. She did not want the crowd to see the degrading of her beauty. It had to remain perfect or not be seen at all. What were her thoughts in her half-century of exile from the cinema? We will never know perhaps. But I would guess she suffered deeply, but serenely, She must have watched the passing years go by with the same wisdom with which she endowed her great heroines.

Man is unable to bear the negation of his existence even in part. What will happen tomorrow when the negation of his existence will be total, when there will be no corner in which to hide himself from others? How strange is man and how strange is his fate.

7 February 1991

How to tell between good and bad

“When should I think of myself as pious?” someone asked Aishah. “When you start thinking of yourself as impious,” she replied. “And when should I think of myself as impious?” the person asked once again. “When you start thinking of yourself as pious,” came Aishah’s reply.

Bearing Witness

Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar (1878-1931) was a famous political leader who dominated the political scene of the sub-continent from 1910 to 1930. His goal was to set India free from the stranglehold of the English, and many incidents have been narrated about his great enthusiasm for this cause.

He was already quite advanced in age when he travelled by sea to the first Round Table Conference, which was held in London on January 4, 1931. At this conference, he made a speech in which he emphasized that his sole commitment was to complete independence. "I will not go back to a slave country. I would prefer to die in a foreign country so long as it is a free country. And if you do not give us back the throne of India (i.e. freedom), you will have to give me a grave here in England".

In respect of the freedom struggle, which to some had become like a religion, these appear to be very fine words. But in respect of the religion of monotheism, they are of no particular value. So far as politics and the 'religion' of freedom are concerned. What is most important is which nation is free and which is not. But in the religion of monotheism, categories of this sort are purely relative.

For one who is immersed in national politics, the most important issues are, of course, freedom and subjugation. But from the Islamic viewpoint, the supreme object of concern is the Hereafter. The true believer remains highly sensitive to the possibility, which Islam holds out to people of treading the path to Heaven, thereby saving themselves from Hell. This, for the true believer – attainment of paradise and avoidance of hellfire – is the most urgent focus of his attention. He is firm in his conviction that the real problem of life is, that which pertains to Eternity, and that all other problems are relative and unreal.

Maulana Mohammad Ali's speech at the Round Table Conference is an example of a statement of non-truth. He proclaimed before the English that salvation from political subjugation is the greatest issue, whereas he should have borne witness to the fact that there is no greater issue than salvation from hellfire. Before the English he held up political independence as the highest good. Whereas he should have told the English that the highest good was paradise, and that they should all seek the blessing and forgiveness of the Lord so that they might enter heaven after death. As the Qur'an puts it: And hasten to earn the forgiveness of your Lord and a paradise as wide as heaven and earth, prepared for the righteous (3:133).

The history of the Prophets tells us that their times too had been afflicted with political subjugation. But they did not raise slogans demanding salvation from this oppressed state. They rather called the people to the One God and the hereafter.

For instance, during the time of the Prophet Joseph, Egypt was under the foreign rule of the Hyksos kings. Even so, the Prophet Joseph did not make an issue of these foreign rulers having to be ousted, as

was later insisted upon by Egyptian nationalists. The Prophet Joseph even accepted the post of the keeper of the treasury under this same foreign king.

During the time of the Prophet Jesus, Palestine was ruled by Romans who had come from elsewhere and had taken possession of the country. At that time Pontius Pilate was the Roman Governor of Palestine. But Christ did not make an issue of this. On the contrary, he gave all his attention to warning people of hellfire in the after-life and to giving good tidings of heaven.

The believer's task is to make monotheism and the hereafter the subjects of his daw'ah, while leaving all else to the will of God. It is also the believers' task to bear witness before people to the truth. If believers launch movements in support of other issues, this is tantamount to bearing witness to non-truths.

We should never lose sight of the fact that the divine succour promised to the believers by God is conditional, i.e., their receiving it depends entirely on their performance of the task of bearing witness to the truth. If they bear witness to non-truths, they will never receive succour from the Almighty.

Umar wrote to one of his governors, "Never inflict undue punishment on a criminal, for if you do, it will be you who will be the criminal and not he."

Superstition: A Weakness

The former American President, Ronald Reagan, according to an official of the Republican party of the U.S.A., keeps a golden ferrule in his pocket all the time. This ferrule was presented to him by one of his friends five years before he was elected president. Ronald Reagan holds that it was the powers of this amulet, which saved him from the attempt made on his life, as well as from many other misfortunes. He cannot entertain the idea of parting with it. Once when he was asked by a government official whether he still kept it in his pocket, he replied: "I sure do." Then he took the ring out of his pocket and showed to him.

This is doubtless just another form of superstition. If superstition can hold men's minds in its grip, it is because life's happenings are so often puzzling and mysterious, and without any rational explanation. Certain unknown forces seem to be at work, which would appear to be responsible for success or failure. And these forces seem to function without any rhyme or reason. I once asked a successful businessman the secret of his success. He thought for a while, then replied, 'luck!' Then he said if I wanted any more reasons for it, he would say luck, luck and more luck!

The mysteriousness, which pervades our lives, is due to an invisible God who remains behind the scenes. Since man is unable to catch sight of Him, he substitutes some visible thing for this invisible God, be it a ring, a ferrule, or any other object.

Man, by his very nature, must have a deity. If he cannot find God, then he replaces Him with something else.

10 February 1991

Speaking little, and not holding grudges against anyone

A companion of the Prophet lay dying. People saw that his face was shining, and asked why "I had two habits which stood me in good stead," the man explained: "for one, I did not indulge in idle talk, and, secondly, my heart was free of malice towards any Muslim."

Belief in God

As I stood in front of India Gate in New Delhi, I thought what a very beautiful specimen of architecture and sculpture it was. It is a structure which bears witness to man's unique faculties. For man to conceive of a thing like 'India Gate' he must think creatively before it can come into existence. He must make plans and then give them a concrete shape.

On observing this, the thought came to mind that even if all the stars, planets, trees and animals were told to make an India Gate, they would fail to do so, even if all of them put their heads together.

This is the case with all other human matters too. All of man's performances are unique, and are his exclusive prerogative. No other being in the known universe is able to do the things which man is capable of by exercising his physical and mental faculties, be it the construction of India Gate or the operating of a complex machine.

God desired that man should realize Him on the conscious plane, that he should recognize Him through his intellect. That is why God created man with such distinctive faculties. Just as man is superior to all the creation of the universe, so is God a superior being as compared to man.

If man were to reflect on the difference between him and the rest of the universe, he would be able to comprehend the difference between him and God. God is the last and ultimate form of this superiority, which man experiences over the rest of the universe. To understand God is as simple a matter as understanding oneself.

The truth is that to believe in God is to believe in something in which we already believe. To see God is to see something which is already there for us to see. Another name for an intensification of what man is experiencing every moment is belief in God. (That is, belief in God involves only an intensification of what man is experiencing every moment) The human being is not the "full stop" in this universe. When a higher state of existence is present in the form of man then why should the existence of another higher state in the form of God not be a possibility?

The Existence of God

The greatest proof of the existence of God is the existence of man himself. It is just as improbable to believe in a being like man as it is to believe in a being of the nature of God. If we believe in man, then there is nothing to stop us from believing in God as well.

The Qur'an tells us that God breathed His Spirit into man (15:29). This means that man is a human specimen of the attributes of God. The real manifestation of these divine attributes existence, life, knowledge, power, intention, authority and other such perfect attributes – derives from the being of God alone. A reflection rather than a share, however, of these attributes has been bestowed upon man. Man, in no respect, is a part of God. But he is, in his being, a tangible proof of the invisible God in whom he is asked to believe. That is to say, the very same attributes of God are present in man in visible form in which he is asked to believe as being inherent in an invisible God, who possesses those attributes in their real form.

Man has a permanent and separate existence of his own. He is capable of seeing, hearing and talking. He thinks and makes plans. He acts on his own initiative: By his personal will, he converts barbarism into civilization. He operates space ships by remote control. He is a conscious being, fully aware of his own existence. He knows what 'I exist' means. The perfect manifestation of these attributes is called God.

The difference between man and God is that man's existence is unreal while that of God is real, Man is the creature, God is the Creator. Man is finite and God is infinite. Man's power is an illusion, whereas God's is a reality. Man is mortal, God is immortal. Whatever man has is a gift bestowed upon him; whatever God has, however, is His own. It is not given to him by anybody.

To believe in the existence of man is to believe in the existence of a "mini-God", so to speak, without any ascription of divinity to him. Then what reason can there be for not believing in the "bigger God"? One who does not believe in God does, however, believe in his own self. He certainly admits the existence of man One who believes in his own self has, therefore, no argument for not believing in God With his belief in the existence of man, he has already demonstrated his belief in the existence of God, whether he admits it verbally or not.

The truth is that the denial of God involves the denial of his own self. And who can reject his own self?

One who Finds God

To find God is to find the greatest reality. When one finds God, it is such a mighty discovery – of the intensity of an earthquake – that it shakes one's whole being.

One who does so bathes in an indescribable kind of divine light.

He becomes a new man. His thinking starts moving in a new direction. His actions see a complete change. All his activities become those of one who can see God before His appearance. He finds himself being weighed in the balance of Doomsday before the coming of that day.

The difference between a *momin* (true believer) and a non-momin is that whatever is going to be experienced by the later in the Hereafter will be experienced by a *momin* to the same degree in this worldly life itself. Whatever a non-*momin* is going to see in the Hereafter, will be seen by the *momin* in this life itself. Whatever a non-*momin* will believe when he is helpless i.e. when there is no other way out but to believe will be believed in by a *momin* today, of his own free will.

13 February 1991

The world is but a drop in the ocean of eternity

Al-Mastaurid Ibn Shaddad heard the Prophet say: "The world, in comparison to eternity, is like one of you putting his finger in the ocean. What does he take with him when he brings his finger out?"

(Muslim)

Faith Goes on Growing

“He that does a good deed We add to its goodness for him.” (42:23)

What is meant by adding to the goodness of one who does a good deed? Some commentators have explained this verse of the Qur'an as follows:

The reward of a good deed means that man -is given more opportunities to do more good deeds, while a bad deed will be rewarded by giving man more opportunities to do bad deeds. (Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*, vol. III, p. 114).

Doing a good deed is an act of will. When a man conducts himself virtuously, he knowingly and willingly avoids an evil deed in order to opt for a good deed. In this way, he activates his will and his consciousness. He awakens himself psychologically, thus inclining his spiritual self towards right action.

Consequently, every act of virtue turns a man into a new human being. Every good deed enables him to do further good deeds. One might say that a good deed acts as an incentive to further right action.

In this world all things fall into two separate categories – those that grow and those that do not. For example, a stone does not grow. It remains in the same state. On the contrary, a tree goes on growing. The Qur'an likens the faith and the faithful to the tree. (14:24). That is, unlike the stone, they do not remain static, but go on increasing, never coming to a standstill.

At various places in the Qur'an it is said that faith is something, which continues to grow:

The true believers are those ... whose faith grows stronger as they listen to His revelation.

As for those who follow the right path, God will increase their guidance (47:17)

As they (the believers) listen, their humility increases. (17:109)

God will increase the guidance of those that have followed the right path. (19:76)

.... Say: Lord, increase my knowledge. (20:114)

Those who have had the wealth of true faith bestowed on them will find their faith goes on increasing in the manner mentioned in the Qur'an. On the contrary, those who have not been lifted up to the heights of the faith will find that their 'faith' is something static which does not grow.

Ata ibn Yasar has related that once Abdullah ibn Rawaha said to one of his companions, “Let's come to bring faith in God for a while.”

These words enraged his companion and he asked, 'Aren't we believers already'? Ibn Rawaha replied, 'Yes, that is true. We are believers. But when we remember God, our faith increases'.

To the companion, faith (*iman*) meant the recitation of the monotheistic creed. There is no god but the One God - after which he felt that his faith was complete. But so, far as Abdullah ibn Rawaha was concerned, he had discovered God the limitless, God with all his perfections. For the former, the recitation of the creed (*kalima*) was all-that mattered, but, to the latter, *kalima* recitation was only the beginning. The concept of God that came to his mind was a treasure house of limitless perfections. This being so, he felt that his remembrance of God should also be endless. He lived in God. And one who lives in God will remember God continuously. He will never have the feeling that he has come to the outermost limit. The third Caliph Uthman said, "If your hearts are purified, you will never feel that you have had your fill of the remembrance of God."

Whether a man feels satisfied or dissatisfied depends upon his capacity for satisfaction. A small container is soon filled up with just a small quantity of water. But no amount of water will fill up the ocean-bed. An ocean requires an unlimited quantity of water, if it is to be filled right up. The same applies to a man. If, like the small container, his desire for God is limited in extent, it will soon be fulfilled. But if, like the ocean, his desire for God is limitless, it will never come to an end.

The common man knows only this of monotheism – that he should just recite these words: "There is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God". After reciting the creed of monotheism, he feels that that is all there is to the matter. There is no further need to think or say any more about it. But one who fully understands the meaning of 'monotheism' will have so much to say about it that words will flow from him in unending torrents.

The scientists who have made great discoveries about the universe in modern times feel that they have uncovered a realm which they will never be able to finish describing, so strange and multifarious are its points of interest. Then imagine how one who discovers the Creator of the universe – even after drawing upon great stores of knowledge, and even after using all the words in the dictionaries, and even after using all the pens and ink in the world – will never come to the end of describing all of his perfections.

If you have not discovered God, you will have few words with which to remember Him. After uttering the words, 'There is no god but God,' you will feel as if all that could be said, has been said. Afterwards, if you say anything at all, it will just be a mere mindless repetition of what has already been said. But once you truly find God, you will have so much to say that no amount of words will be enough to express your feelings. And you will never feel that you have said absolutely everything there is to say on this subject.

If there is no limit to God, there can be no limit to the realization of God. Just as God is limitless, so is the realization of God also limitless. One whose realization of God is limited has not truly found God. His progress has been arrested at some 'limit'. He has not yet attained to the 'limitless'.

16 February 1991

One who will be saved from Doom on the Day of Judgement

“On the Day of Resurrection, God will save from Hell-fire one who has saved his brother from humiliation in this world;” these words were spoken by the Prophet Mohammad.

The Quest for God

There was once a very intelligent man who remained preoccupied with the thought that he could never attain his true position in life. Finally, he resolved this problem by committing suicide. In his suicide note he wrote:

"I am putting an end to my life, because I feel I have probably wandered into a world for which I was not created."

This feeling of there being something lacking is usually found in those people who are born with great intelligence. They either live out lives of disappointment and lack of fulfillment, which only come to an end when they die a natural death, or else they cut the whole process short by committing suicide. It is common, on the other hand, to find people of lesser intelligence leading thoroughly contented lives. But among people of higher intelligence, one will rarely come across anyone who has succeeded in leading a life of contentment.

The reason for this is man's innate idealism. Everyone by his very nature, is in search of an ideal. But, in this world, it has proved so difficult to find this ideal that the saying, 'The ideal is unattainable' has gained currency. Often, the mediocre person will imagine that he has found the ideal, but that is because his sensitivity is so under-developed that he cannot discern the difference between the ideal and the non-ideal, and this leaves him happily preoccupied with the latter. But those of sharper intelligence immediately sense the difference, that is why they are not willing to accept anything which falls short of the highest standards.

Man's ideal can only be one, and that is his Creator and Sustainer. What people of higher intelligence are seeking, could they but realize it, is nothing but the divine mission. Only God's existence is ideal. And only by becoming engrossed in God's mission can we find that moral zenith which will satisfy the whole of our being, and which will conform in every detail to our intellectual perception of the ideal.

Man's ideal is his God, but he ceaselessly attempts to discover this ideal in a non-God.

Under God's Protection

Islam is a religion which, from the outset, has been sedulously preserved in immaculate, pristine form – the Muslims being both its beneficiaries and its bearers. It is this bearer-status enjoyed by the Muslims which gives them the singular privilege of being a people who will never face extinction. If it is impossible to obliterate Islam from the face of the earth, then it is equally impossible to extirpate the Muslims, for God's protection of Islam and the Muslims will last until Doomsday itself.

Time and again, the Almighty has given concrete expression to His will to protect the Muslim community (*Ummah*). For example, in the first phase of Islam, it became impossible after a certain stage for the Muslims to remain in Mecca. At that very point in time, God created a powerful centre for Muslims in Medina. Then again after the passing away of the Prophet, all the Arab tribes united against Islam, an event recorded in Islamic history as the apostasy (*Fitna-e-Irtidad*).

With the special succour of God, however, this massive revolt was administered a crushing defeat. Another instance of God's support for His servants was the victory he gave them over the Roman and Persian empires when the latter tried to exterminate the Muslims. Later, too, the Christian countries of Europe united to attack the Muslim world in order to capture Syria and Palestine. But, again after a war spanning 200 years, they had a crushing defeat inflicted upon them. Similarly, during the last Abbasid Caliphate, the Tartar tribes overran and devastated the Muslim empires. They demolished all the mosques from Samarqand (now in the U.S.S.R.) to Baghdad. But within just fifty years, the whole course of history changed with the Tartars accepting Islam. They reconstructed the mosques that they themselves had demolished, and therein prostrated themselves in all humility before God.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Mughal empire saw its dissolution. And at the beginning of the 20th century, the Ottoman empire disintegrated. At that time, it appeared that the Muslims had no future in the world. But after the Second World War, Islam was again on the world map with more than fifty independent Muslim countries, in which Islamic activities were being engaged in with even greater zeal, and on a much vaster scale than ever before.

Muslims are called a blessed community, or a community which has been shown mercy. This is not strictly accurate. It would be more true to say that the Muslims are a protected community. That is to say that despite their straying from the straight and narrow path, they will never have to suffer total annihilation as a matter of divine retribution. No nation will ever have the power to wipe them out completely. This does not depend upon any superiority, or upon their being the chosen people, but rather upon the protection God affords them by virtue of their being followers (*Ummah*) of the final Prophet.

This divine will (*sunnah*) has been very much in evidence in modern times in the context of a redressal of the kind of Muslim woes which stemmed from inadequate and misguided leadership. The Muslim leaders of today had so misled their own people that the latter had failed to establish any solid base for themselves in the modern world. Innumerable movements, conducted in such a way as to cause public disturbances, had only amounted to a waste of their energy. Sad to say, none of these movements had been truly aimed at providing them with any of the things which are considered to be of value in the present day. Then, too, as a result of wrong leadership, Muslims had failed to find their place in the field of modern economics. They had almost descended to the level of the Harijans (the lowest caste who are regarded as untouchables) of modern times. But then, God stepped in and with His superior arrangement, provided for them in a manner befitting the servants of the Almighty. For example, He blessed the Muslim countries with fifty per cent of the world's oil resources. Petroleum being one of the most coveted of natural treasures, the Muslims' economic backwardness was compensated for by their being given possession of such a large share of it.

Such facts were hidden in the universe as were to testify to the truth of the Qur'an being a divine book. But Muslim leaders, thanks to their preoccupation with futile activities, were not in a position to give their time to discovering them. It was not they, but western nations who, through God's instrumentality, made these momentous discoveries in their stead. By discovering great treasure troves of natural resources they provided factual evidence in support of the following Quranic verse:

We will show them our signs in all the regions of the earth and in their own souls. Until they clearly see that this is the truth (41:53).

God wanted the message of this religion to be communicated all over the world. He had, therefore, provided a superior means of communication which lay hidden in nature, waiting to be discovered. But our Muslim leaders, in their misguided way, failed to discover any of these things. That was why God engaged other nations in this work of research, until all those methods of data propagation which are known as the print and electronic media, came into existence. With the invention of these means of communication, it is becoming increasingly easy to spread the message of Islam all over the globe.

There are many such instances of God's compensating for the Muslims' neglect of their own interests. Muslims should come to a full realization of how much God has done for them, and, in this awareness, should devote themselves whole heartedly to the service of Islam. It is for this that God has granted them His special succour and protection.

20 February 1991

When knowledge is reduced to an avenue towards personal prestige

'Ubayy ibn Ka'ab said: "Acquire knowledge, and practice it Do not acquire it in order to beautify yourselves thereby, for there will come a time when learning will be used as an adornment, as people adorn themselves with clothes."

Holding Sacred that which is not Sacred

Nothan Soderblom observed in a work completed in 1913 that the notion of holiness formed the central concept of religion. Since then the history of religions has been studied on a vast scale, a large number of scholarly books having been written on the subject in German, French, English and other languages. With very few exceptions, scholars of religion are in agreement that holiness is the basic tenet of religion, that is, the attribution of such mystical qualities or powers to certain persons or things as are not ever found in ordinary creatures or objects. These mystical attributes cannot be explained by general, rational principles or concepts. The *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* discusses this in detail in its article on 'Holiness'.

This concept of holiness is not an imaginary thing: It is deeply ingrained in the nature of man. The feeling generated by it is properly employed when it is concentrated exclusively on God. But it frequently happens that this urge within man is diverted to something which, in actual fact, is not holy. The actual feeling of reverence for holiness, which should have been directed towards the creator, finds its way instead towards some creature.

The reason for this is that since God is an invisible reality, Man is unable to see God with the naked eye, and, therefore, gives his attention to whatever else strikes him as most prominent in his immediate surroundings; he then begins to invest it with sanctity, and to worship it as if it were genuinely holy. It is that psychology which produced in ancient time what is called polytheism in religious terminology, and nature worship in academic parlance. This basic urge to worship impelled man from within to revere something which was holy. Consequently, he started worshipping anything which made a great visual impact upon him, e.g. stars, rain, animals, plants, water and fire. The concept of a high God existed as the Prophets had taught man. But this concept of a high God came to be distorted to mean that the high God "was the lord in heaven who had withdrawn from the immediate details of governing the world. This kind of high God – a hidden, or idle God – had delegated all work on earth to these 'nature spirits', which were the forces, or personifications of the forces of nature." (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 12, p.877).

Scholars of religion agree in general that the concept of holiness is the cohesive force in all religions. That is, for a religion to hold" together, some unique or extraordinary person or thing must be designated as sacred and stand at the apex of the sum of its beliefs. This cannot be explained in terms of general, rational principles.

The commonest human reactions to objects of sanctity are fear and fascination. Only the sacred can fulfill man's deepest needs and aspirations. Thus, the reverence that man shows for whatever is held sacred is composed both of trust and of terror. There is also the view that the acceptance of something as sacrosanct signals the boundaries of human effort, where man's inherent limitations prevent him from seeking any further.

The objects of man's reverence are disparate in nature, e.g. stones, animals, the sea, the sun, the moon, kings and other religious personalities. Whatever is held sacred is worshipped, and sacrifices are made to it. Rituals are observed in order to please it, escape its punishments and elicit its favours.

"Sacredness is manifested," observes the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "in sacred officials. Such as priests and kings; in specially designated sacred places, such as temples and images, and in natural objects, such as rivers, the sun, mountains, or trees. The priest is a special agent in the religious cult, his ritual actions represent the divine action. Similarly, the king or emperor is a special mediator between heaven and earth and has been called by such names as the 'son of heaven,' or an 'arm of god'." (16/24).

Here are some of the important anthropologists who hold sacredness to be on the basis of religion. Their names are as follows:

Nothan Soderblom, Rudolf Otto, Emile Durkhem, Max Scheler Gerardus van der Leeuw, W. Brede Kristensen, Friedrich Heiler, Gustav Mensching, Roger Caillois, Mircea Eliade (16/ 124).

The modern scholars of religion are right in saying that the basic idea behind religion is the concept of holiness. This feeling of holiness in itself is a natural feeling. However, when some other object besides one God is considered holy, this is the wrong application of a real, natural feeling. And this is the root cause of all kinds of evils. When man holds the non-holy as holy, he closes all the doors to progress.

There are two aspects of holding the non-holy as holy. One is to consider all of nature as being sacred, and the other is to revere certain individuals as being sacrosanct. Both kinds of evils have been found all over the world since ancient times. This has been the greatest reason for man's thinking having remained unscientific.

The notion of holiness is deeply rooted in human psychology. To define in a phrase, such a psychology is extremely difficult, for the words used to express profound psychological states are more often symbolic than realistic. I would simply agree in principle that the concept of holiness is the focal point of religion. This existence of holiness, is, nevertheless, real and not imaginary, as modern scholars of religion would have us believe.

The truth is that the urge to worship is a natural instinct which every man is born with. Man, because of this deep inner urge, wants actively to bow before something which he regards as sacred. There are two forms in which this feeling finds expression one is monotheism, the other polytheism.

When man holds one God sacred and worships him as his Deity, he directs his feelings to the proper place. It is, in reality, God who possesses the attribute of sacredness. Holding the one and only God sacred is, therefore, to acknowledge a great truth.

But the mistake man makes is to worship and revere whatever object he finds outstanding in this world, or whatever he finds different from himself, imagining it to be sacred. This is the wrong use of the right

feeling. This is giving to a non-god what is due to the one and only God. In religious terminology this is known as polytheism or, in common parlance, superstition.

It was this error of holding mere things holy instead of God Himself which prevented the emergence of science for thousands of years in the past. When we believe in one God, no scientific or intellectual problem arises in doing so, for God is beyond our physical reach and our Sphere of functioning. He is beyond the heavens, through which man cannot pass.

The material objects which are considered holy, fall, on the other hand, within the sphere of human action. And whenever these things have been surrounded with an aura of holy mystery, they have assumed too exalted a status to be subjected to scientific investigation. It is precisely in making an intellectual conquest of these things that science has had its beginnings.

All things other than God are mere creatures. These are the things which are generally known as natural phenomena. It is these phenomena which provide the groundwork for science. To study them and to conquer and control them is what is meant by scientific procedure.

From ancient times the phenomena of nature had universally been considered sacred; as such, all these things, far from being objects of conquest, became objects of worship. It was this intellectual perversion which prevented scientific action for thousands of years in the past. The door to progress opened only when the revolution of monotheism changed human thinking and brought nature down from its pedestal of holiness.

24 February 1991

Weighing up one's actions before they are weighed up on the divine scales of justice

"Reckon with yourselves," 'Umar said, "before you are reckoned with in the next world; and weigh your own actions before they are weighed on the divine scales of justice; and prepare yourselves for the great appearance (before God)."

24 February 1991

Hardness of heart comes from using religion for worldly ends

“The punishment of a learned man is for his heart to die.” said Hasan al-Basri. He was asked what was meant by the death of the heart, and he answered that it came from seeking the world by means of actions which should be gauged towards eternity.

Purposeful Character

When the telephone rang on September 6, 1990, I picked up the receiver and found myself talking to Anita Pratap, a special correspondent of *Time* magazine. It seemed that she needed some information on the position of women in Islam. I suggested that she should come to our office so that we could discuss the whole issue. Arriving punctually, she showed me a previously prepared article in English on the status of women in Islam. Based on information supplied by *Time*'s representatives in various Muslim countries, it was entitled, 'Behind the Veil'. This had been sent to her by the head office in New York. First, information had been collected, sifted through, assessed, and then written up. But this was only a first draft. Now the important process of verification had to be gone through. Copies of this draft had therefore been sent to several of *Time* staffers in different Islamic areas, so that they could have it thoroughly scrutinized by genuine religious scholars. (This was what was now required of me.) In this way, not even the smallest error could escape detection. Only when the chief editor was satisfied that the process of verification was absolutely complete would the article be deemed fit for publication.

I asked Ms. Pratap why they worked so hard for just one article. She replied, "Our magazine, *Time* International, is read all over the world. We just can't afford to make any mistakes."

There is a great lesson to be learned on the subject of achievement from these words uttered by *Time*'s representative, consider that *Time* aims at having subscribers from all over the world. If it is to succeed in this, there should not be a single mistake in any of its issues. If people feel that its reports are based on wrong, or even inadequate information, they will stop subscribing to it. *Time* would then have no hope of world circulation.

Time cannot afford to be slipshod about its facts, because that would be the surest way to unpopularity and a major drop in circulation. Readers cannot, after all, remain interested in 'facts' if there is to be constant doubt about their veracity.

The same psychology, on a much greater scale, is characteristic of a *da'i*. The *da'i*'s chief objective is to make God's religion acceptable to the people. To this end, the *da'i* ensures, in all possible ways, that there should be no such untoward occurrence between himself and the *mad'u* (his listener) as will turn the latter away from the truth, thus making God's religion a matter of doubt in the *mad'u*'s eyes – in short, unacceptable to him.

For this purpose, a dayee is extremely careful to avoid such 'errors'. He communicates his message in the language of the *mad'u* (Qur'an. 14:4); he speaks to him with such sincerity that it reaches his very soul (4:63); he bears with patience all the hurt that the *mad'u* causes him (14:12); he renders material assistance to people in order to soften their hearts (9:60); he purifies himself of all moral weaknesses

(74:4); he becomes the *madu*'s well-wisher to the greatest possible extent (7:79); he sometimes even goes so far as to grant unjust wishes, as the Prophet did when he eliminated the words, 'the Messenger of God" on the occasion of drafting the Hudaibiyyah peace treaty, just because of the stubborn insistence of the *mad'u*.

As the representative of *Time* put it, "We can't afford to make mistakes". The same thing, only with greater intensity, has to be said by a *da'i*. The dayee must feel that he cannot afford to do or say anything which will distance the *mad'u* from his message. He should, of his own accord, and with no reference to others, bear the entire responsibility of never allowing the *mad'u* to feel doubtful about his message of truth. He must make up his mind to avoid, at all costs, any action which might produce an antagonistic psychology in the *mad'u*, thereby rendering his message unacceptable.

26 February 1991

Doing little jobs does not belittle a person

The caliph, 'Umar Ibn 'Abdul' Aziz was talking to a person late one night, The lamp started to go out. "I will wake up the servant. He will put oil in it," the man said. 'Umar told him not to do so. He himself arose, fetched oil and put it in the lamp. "I was 'Umar Ibn 'Abdul Aziz before I performed this little task," he said, "and I still am 'Umar ibn 'Abdul 'Aziz.